

Summary of Literary Periods, Concepts, and Authors

In This Chapter

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A Few Major Concepts or “Isms”	Featured Authors on Released Exams

OVERVIEW

Literature might be thought of as the creative measure of history. Great writers, poets, and playwrights mold their sense of life and the events of their time (their own histories) into works of art. It seems impossible to disconnect most literary works from their historical context, but the themes that make their work universal and enduring perhaps do transcend time in that they speak to people of all time, ensuring us that we are all part of something much larger than simply the here and now.

When you look at the literary concepts below and study the timeline, you will see that shifts in literary theory or tradition are often precipitated by major events in history, most notably wars. The ways that history is linked to literature are endless, and this chapter only hints at some of them.

This chapter is not here for you to memorize. In fact there are rarely questions on the exam that expect you to know particular literary periods and their characteristics. However, it will not hurt you

to have a sense of how literature (particularly Western literature) has evolved over time. And this timeline and the representative authors will help you determine a reading list for your study.

A FEW MAJOR CONCEPTS OR “ISMS”

The following list is given in chronological order.

Romanticism (mid-19th century)

- Valued feeling over reason
- Valued the individual, but recognized the alienation of the individual
- Literature characterized by elements of the supernatural, appreciation for the beauty of nature, personal introspection

Transcendentalism (mid-19th century)

- An offshoot of American Romanticism led by Bronson Alcott, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Favored self-reliance and non-conformism
- Sought to see the sublime in the ordinary
- Believed that to transcend was to reach beyond ordinary experience—self perfection was an aim

Realism (mid- to late 19th century)

- Pre- and post-Civil war
- Writers rejected sentimentality, wanted to represent true life experience, including the way people really acted and spoke
- Shunned flowery diction and romanticism
- The rise of the women’s movement also significant

Regionalism (19th century)

- Extension of Realism
- Focus on local setting, customs, and dialects

Naturalism (19th century)

- Extension of Realism
- Themes are darker: crime, poverty, prejudice, etc.
- Naturalist writers tried to understand scientific or psychological reasons behind behavior

Imagism (early 20th century)

- Movement in poetry that favored the use of images as the things themselves
- Motto: “The natural object is always the adequate symbol.”
- Willingness to play with forms
- Most notable poets: Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams

The Lost Generation (1914–)

- The Lost Generation is the phrase coined by writer Gertrude Stein and later made popular by Ernest Hemingway
- Referred to the generation who lost fathers, husbands, sons and brothers in World War I and who felt aimless and without foundation
- Many of the lost were disillusioned by traditional American values and became expatriots, who chose to leave the United States for Europe, Mexico, and elsewhere. (Paris was an especially favored destination.)

The Harlem Renaissance (1920s)

- The explosion of African American visual art, dance, music, and literature in the 1920s, primarily centered in Harlem, New York
- Poet Langston Hughes is often seen as the symbol of the period.

Modernism (1918–1945)

- The prolific period between the end of World War I and the end of World War II
- Other historical context:
 - ▶ *The industrial revolution and the age of machines*
 - ▶ *Mass immigration to the United States*
 - ▶ *Women’s rights (19th amendment)*
 - ▶ *The Great Depression*
- Alienation and the loss of the individual to the machine are major themes.

Post Modernism (1945–)

- Begins with detonation of atom bombs in Japan to end World War II
- Key markers:
 - ▶ *Post-apocalyptic themes*
 - ▶ *Satire*
 - ▶ *The absurd*
 - ▶ *Anti-heroes*
 - ▶ *The rise of multiculturalism and diverse voices*
- Themes:
 - ▶ *Alienation due to race, gender, and sexual orientation*
 - ▶ *Intolerance*
 - ▶ *Political and social oppression*

The Beat Movement (1950s)

- Led by poet Allen Ginsberg and novelist Jack Kerouac
- Rejected mainstream American values and embraced nonconformity and Eastern philosophy
- The forefather of the 1960s counter-culture movement (Hippie Movement)

Gonzo Journalism (1970–)

- Named by Hunter S. Thompson in 1970
- Refers to a new kind of journalism where the writer can be part of the story, blending fact and fiction

Magical Realism (1960s–)

- Magical or supernatural elements appear in otherwise realistic circumstances
- First considered an element of painting
- Mostly associated with Latin American writers, especially Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Isabel Allende

Creative Nonfiction (late 20th and early 21st century)

- A genre that blends elements of literature with nonfiction
- Includes memoir, travel and place essays, personal narratives, etc.

LITERARY TIMELINE

Literary timelines are readily available to literature students. The value of a timeline is to show literary works in a historical context and in relationship to other works. The timeline below is not inclusive, but shows some of the major writers of each literary period. Consult Chapter 4 for lists of works cited on the AP Lit exam.

800–400 BCE**World Literature**

- Greek writers: Homer, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*
 Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*
 Euripedes, *Medea*

250 BCE–150 CE**World Literature**

- Roman writers: Vergil, *The Aeneid*
 Horace, poet and satirist
 Ovid, lyrical poet

450–1066**World Literature**

Haiku poetry in Japan

British Literature (Anglo Saxon Period)

Beowulf

1066–1500**World Literature**

Italian writers: Petrarch: sonnets

Dante Alighieri: *The Divine Comedy*Boccaccio: *The Decameron***British Literature (Middle English Period)**Geoffrey Chaucer: *Canterbury Tales*

German Johannes Gutenberg invents the printing press

1500–1660: The Renaissance**World Literature**Miguel de Cervantes, Spanish writer: *Don Quixote***British Literature**

Shakespeare

Christopher Marlow: *Dr. Faustus*

Ben Jonson, known for satirical plays and lyric poetry

John Donne, known for metaphysical conceits

Edmund Spenser: *The Faerie Queen*Andrew Marvell: *To His Coy Mistress*John Milton: *Paradise Lost***1660–1785: The Neoclassical Period****World Literature**Molière, French, *Tartuffe*Voltaire, French, *Candide*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, French writer and philosopher

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German writer

British Literature

Alexander Pope, British poet

Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*Jonathan Swift: *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Modest Proposal*

Samuel Johnson

*The rise of the novel***American Literature (Puritan/Colonial Period)**Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*

(sermon)

Anne Bradstreet, poet

*Puritan writing was God centered, plain in style, instructive in purpose.***1750–1800:****American Literature****(The Age of Reason/Revolutionary Literature)**Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine: *Common Sense*

Benjamin Franklin

African-American poet Phillis Wheatley, *Poetry on Various**Subjects**Period recognized by emerging nationalism; characterized by persuasive, philosophical writing: speeches, pamphlets, and the beginnings of newspapers in America.***1785–1830: The Romantic Period/Romanticism****British Literature**

William Blake, William Wordsworth

Samuel Taylor Coleridge: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Jane Austen

Lord Byron

Percy Bysshe Shelley

John Keats

Alfred Lord Tennyson

Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*

American Literature

Washington Irving: *Rip Van Winkle*

William Cullen Bryant: *Thanatopsis*

James Fenimore Cooper: *The Last of the Mohicans*

Nathaniel Hawthorne (often included in this period), see below.

1832–1901: The Victorian Period

World Literature

Henrik Ibsen, Norwegian dramatist: *A Doll's House*

Victor Hugo, French: *Les Misérables*

Gustave Flaubert, French: *Madame Bovary*

British Literature

Robert Browning, poet

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, poet

Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations*

Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*

William Makepeace Thackeray: *Vanity Fair*

George Eliot, a.k.a. Marian Evans: *Middlarch*

American Literature

Henry James

Frederick Douglass: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*

Harriet Jacobs: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

Paul Laurence Dunbar: *Lyrics of a Lowly Life*

1840–1860: American Renaissance

Transcendentalism and American Gothic (dark romantics)

Emily Dickinson, poet

Walt Whitman: *Leaves of Grass*

Nathaniel Hawthorne: *The Scarlet Letter*

Herman Melville: *Moby Dick*

Edgar Allan Poe, poems and short stories

Transcendentalist Writers

Ralph Waldo Emerson, essays and aphorisms

Henry David Thoreau: *Walden*

Bronson Alcott

Margaret Fuller, first major feminist writer

1855–1900: American Realism/Regionalism

Mark Twain (born Samuel Clemens): *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Bret Harte: regional writer

Stephen Crane: *The Red Badge of Courage*

Kate Chopin: *The Awakening*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman: *The Yellow Wallpaper*

1901–1914

British (Edwardian Period)

Joseph Conrad, Polish/British author: *Heart of Darkness*

American (Naturalism)

Theodore Dreiser, novelist: *Sister Carrie* (1900)

W.E.B. Du Bois, sociologist and author: *The Souls of Black Folk*

Jack London, novelist: *The Call of the Wild*
 Edith Wharton, novelist: *Ethan Frome*

1919–1945

Modernism

World Literature

Albert Camus, French writer: *The Stranger*

British Literature

George Orwell (born Eric Blair): *Animal Farm* and 1984

American Literature

John Steinbeck, Nobel Prize novelist: *Of Mice and Men* and
The Grapes of Wrath

Zora Neale Hurston, novelist: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Langston Hughes, poet

Tennessee Williams, playwright: *The Glass Menagerie*

1950–: Post Modernism

British Literature

William Golding, British author: *Lord of the Flies*

American Literature

(Note: Ethnicities are listed below only to show the range of diversity in literature in this period.)

J.D. Salinger, novelist: *The Catcher in the Rye*

Ralph Ellison, African American novelist: *Invisible Man*

Arthur Miller, playwright: *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman*

Ray Bradbury, science fiction writer: *Fahrenheit 451*

Eugene O'Neill, playwright: *Long Day's Journey Into Night*

Jack Kerouac, Beat writer: *On the Road*

Elie Wiesel, Romanian-American writer: *Night*

Joseph Heller, novelist: *Catch 22* (1961)

John Knowles, novelist: *A Separate Peace*

Ken Kesey, American author: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

Sylvia Plath, known mostly for poetry (1932-63): *The Bell Jar* (1963)

Chaim Potok, Jewish-American novelist: *The Chosen*

Maya Angelou, African-American author: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Toni Morrison, African-American Nobel Prize novelist:

The Bluest Eye

Rudolfo Anaya, Mexican-American writer: *Bless Me, Ultima*

Maxine Hong Kingston, Asian-American writer: *The Woman Warrior*

Alice Walker, African-American writer: *The Color Purple*

August Wilson, African-American, Pulitzer Prize winning playwright: *Fences* and *The Piano Lesson*

Sandra Cisneros, Hispanic-American writer: *The House on Mango Street*

Louise Erdrich, Native American writer: *Love Medicine*

Amy Tan, Asian-American novelist: *The Joy Luck Club*

FEATURED AUTHORS

This list below is from the 2008 Course Description as published by the College Board. The purpose of this list is to suggest the broad range of authors that can be considered for study in an AP Lit course. Use this list in combination with the timeline above and the list of literary works in Chapter 4 to create a reading list for yourself. Remember, it is far better to know five or six works in depth, than to have a cursory knowledge of more.

POETRY

W. H. Auden; Elizabeth Bishop; William Blake; Anne Bradstreet; Edward Kamau Brathwaite; Gwendolyn Brooks; Robert Browning; George Gordon, Lord Byron; Lorna Dee Cervantes; Geoffrey Chaucer; Lucille Clifton; Samuel Taylor Coleridge; Billy Collins; H. D. (Hilda Doolittle); Emily Dickinson; John Donne; Rita Dove; Paul Laurence Dunbar; T. S. Eliot; Robert Frost; Joy Harjo; Seamus Heaney; George Herbert; Garrett Hongo; Gerard Manley Hopkins; Langston Hughes; Ben Jonson; John Keats; Philip Larkin; Robert Lowell; Andrew Marvell; John Milton; Marianne Moore; Sylvia Plath; Edgar Allan Poe; Alexander Pope; Adrienne Rich; Anne Sexton; William Shakespeare; Percy Bysshe Shelley; Leslie Marmon Silko; Cathy Song; Wallace Stevens; Alfred, Lord Tennyson; Derek Walcott; Walt Whitman; Richard Wilbur; William Carlos Williams; William Wordsworth; William Butler Yeats

DRAMA

Aeschylus; Edward Albee; Amiri Baraka; Samuel Beckett; Anton Chekhov; Caryl Churchill; William Congreve; Athol Fugard; Lorraine Hansberry; Lillian Hellman; David Henry Hwang; Henrik Ibsen; Ben Jonson; David Mamet; Arthur Miller; Molière; Marsha Norman; Sean O'Casey; Eugene O'Neill; Suzan-Lori Parks; Harold Pinter; Luigi Pirandello; William Shakespeare; George Bernard Shaw; Sam Shepard; Sophocles; Tom Stoppard; Luis Valdez; Oscar Wilde; Tennessee Williams; August Wilson

FICTION (NOVEL AND SHORT STORY)

Chinua Achebe; Sherman Alexie; Isabel Allende; Rudolfo Anaya; Margaret Atwood; Jane Austen; James Baldwin; Saul Bellow; Charlotte Brontë; Emily Brontë; Raymond Carver; Willa Cather; Sandra Cisneros; John Cheever; Kate Chopin; Joseph Conrad; Edwidge Danticat; Daniel Defoe; Anita Desai; Charles Dickens; Fyodor Dostoevsky; George Eliot; Ralph Ellison; Louise Erdrich; William Faulkner; Henry Fielding; F. Scott Fitzgerald; E. M. Forster; Thomas Hardy; Nathaniel Hawthorne; Ernest Hemingway; Zora Neale Hurston; Kazuo Ishiguro; Henry James; Ha Jin; Edward P. Jones; James

Joyce; Maxine Hong Kingston; Joy Kogawa; Jhumpa Lahiri; Margaret Laurence; D. H. Lawrence; Chang-rae Lee; Bernard Malamud; Gabriel García Márquez; Cormac McCarthy; Ian McEwan; Herman Melville; Toni Morrison; Bharati Mukherjee; Vladimir Nabokov; Flannery O'Connor; Orhan Pamuk; Katherine Anne Porter; Marilynne Robinson; Jonathan Swift; Mark Twain; John Updike; Alice Walker; Evelyn Waugh; Eudora Welty; Edith Wharton; John Edgar Wideman; Virginia Woolf; Richard Wright

EXPOSITORY PROSE

Joseph Addison; Gloria Anzaldúa; Matthew Arnold; James Baldwin; James Boswell; Jesús Colón; Joan Didion; Frederick Douglass; W.E.B. Du Bois; Ralph Waldo Emerson; William Hazlitt; bell hooks; Samuel Johnson; Charles Lamb; Thomas Macaulay; Mary McCarthy; John Stuart Mill; George Orwell; Michael Pollan; Richard Rodriguez; Edward Said; Lewis Thomas; Henry David Thoreau; E. B. White; Virginia Woolf